

# Fort Sumter: The First Shots of the Civil War

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## South Carolina Social Studies Content Standards

- 4.1.16 state the causes and events leading to the Civil War;
- 4.1.17 identify the notable figures of the Civil War and the roles they played;
- 4.1.18 describe the Civil War and its effects on the nation;
- 8.4.1 identify the series of events leading to the election of Lincoln and the outbreak of Civil War,
- 8.4.2 describe the causes and course of the Civil War and its effects on the American people,

## South Carolina Social Studies Process Standards

- Work with others to gather information.
- Communicate in written form using appropriate writing standards.
- Communicate their interpretation of issues in paragraphs, essays, and term papers.
- Consider multiple perspectives
- Establish chronological order in constructing students' own historical narratives

Focus Question: After Lincoln was elected, would it have been possible to compromise and avoid war or was war inevitable?

## Background History

When Abraham Lincoln was elected on November 6, 1860, the legislature of South Carolina, acting on orders from Governor William H. Gist, passed a law calling for a convention of the people of the state to address the situation of remaining as a state in the Federal Union. The convention, to be held in the capital of Columbia, was to convene on December 17, 1860. The delegates met at the First Baptist Church in Columbia on the given day, but left quickly when news of a smallpox outbreak became known. The convention regrouped in Charleston and on December 20 passed the Ordinance of Secession. The delegates signed the ordinance at South Carolina Institute Hall on Meeting Street.

The South Carolinians wanted to make sure that it was understood that they were not “rebellious” from the United States of America, but that they had removed themselves from the union of states in which they had voluntarily joined during the Revolutionary Period. To make this known, they issued the “Declaration of the Immediate Causes which induce and justify the Secession of South Carolina from the Federal Union.”

At the time of the secession, Major Robert Anderson, commander of the federal garrison in Charleston, had been instructed by the Secretary of War to avoid any action that might incite aggression and to hold the federal forts in the area and to defend them at all costs. There were four forts; Castle Pinckney, located on a small island in the harbor close to the city; Fort Moultrie, located on Sullivan’s Island; Fort Johnson, located on

James' Island, and Fort Sumter, located on a manmade island at the entrance to the harbor. Anderson and his men were stationed at Fort Moultrie, but not being a large enough unit to hold more than one of the forts, it was decided that Sumter was the most proper to secure. Therefore, on the night of December 26, 1860, six days after the secession of South Carolina, Major Anderson and his men secretly left Fort Moultrie and moved to Fort Sumter. Even though the actions of Anderson and his men were not intended to be aggressive, South Carolina interpreted the move as such and demanded from President Buchanan that the fort be evacuated. The president refused to comply with the South Carolinians' demands. With Fort Sumter in federal hands and South Carolina demanding its surrender, a very volatile situation was created.

One of the big problems facing the US government was that the troops now stationed at Fort Sumter would need to be resupplied. President Buchanan ordered a ship to take men, supplies, and arms to Fort Sumter. A warship, the *Brooklyn*, was first selected to take the reinforcements, but President Buchanan was persuaded that an unarmed merchant ship would be look less threatening to South Carolina. Therefore, the *Star of the West*, loaded with 200 soldiers, as well as arms and ammunition, left for Fort Sumter. On January 9, 1862, as the *Star of the West* approached the island, a group of Citadel cadets located on Morris Island fired on the ship. Ready to defend the ship, Major Anderson was prepared to fire, but before he could, the *Star of the West* turned around and left the harbor.

On February 4, 1861, the Confederate States of America was created in Montgomery, Alabama. South Carolina was no longer standing alone, but had been joined by five other deep south states, Georgia, Alabama, Mississippi, Florida, and Louisiana in a confederacy that strongly supported states' rights and the rights of the states to continue the institution of slavery. Jefferson Davis of Mississippi was elected the President of the CSA and Alexander Stephens of Georgia was elected its vice president. Texas joined the CSA soon after.

A month after the creation of the CSA, the USA inaugurated its new president, Abraham Lincoln. In his inaugural address, Lincoln pledged that "the power confided to me will be used to hold, occupy, and possess the property and places belonging to the government," By this time, there were just two major federal properties in the seceded states that were still in Federal hands, Fort Pickens in Pensacola, Florida and Fort Sumter. How he would handle the situation of these forts was creating quite a dilemma. President Lincoln did not want to start a war, yet he knew that he would need to resupply the forts before too long. How he could resupply the forts and keep them in federal hands without instigating the hostilities was a problem with which he had to deal. If he could get the South to fire on him, then Lincoln and the USA would be justified in using force to defend themselves and bring the Confederate states back into the fold.

While Lincoln was debating these issues, many were working towards a compromise between the Federal government and the seceded southern states. The most famous of these compromises was the Crittenden Compromise which proposed a series of constitutional amendments that would address the Southern complaints against the Federal government. The compromise would have made guaranteed the existence of slavery where it already was in place. It would have also extended the Missouri Compromise line of 36° 30" to the west coast. The Compromise was killed when Lincoln and the Republican Party refused to accept it.

While attempt after attempt to settle the issue failed, the men at the forts were running out of supplies. Finally, Lincoln decided to act. On April 6, Lincoln sent word to the newly elected governor of South Carolina, Francis W. Pickens, that Lincoln was going to send a fleet to bring supplies to the men at Fort Sumter, but only provisions. He would not send any men, ammunition or arms to the fort as long as the fleet or the fort was not attacked. The Confederate troops in Charleston had been put under the command of General Pierre G. T Beauregard. Beauregard sent word to Major Anderson on April 11, 1861, that Anderson must evacuate the fort. Anderson replied that he would not, but added in his reply that he and his men would be starved out soon if reinforcements did not arrive. When asked by Beauregard when that would occur, Major Anderson replied that they would have to leave the fort by noon on the 15<sup>th</sup> of April unless they received notice to the contrary from Washington, DC. Beauregard, unable to wait that long since the Federal supply ships were getting close, sent word at 3:20 am on April 12 that bombing would begin in an hour. At 4:30 am, the first shot was fired from Ft. Johnson on James Island by soldiers under the command of Captain George James of the South Carolina Artillery - and the war had begun. After being shelled for 34 hours, Major Anderson sent word that he would surrender the fort and the shelling ceased. On Sunday, April 14, 1861, Major Anderson and his men lowered the US flag from the fort and boarded a ship bound for New York. The war had begun. Exactly four years later, to the day, April 14, 1865, Anderson returned to Charleston, SC and Fort Sumter to again raise the flag that he had lowered in 1861 bringing a symbolic end to the war that had started at that site.

One of the many interesting notes on Fort Sumter was the relationship between USA Major Robert Anderson and CSA General Pierre Gustave Toutant Beauregard. Robert Anderson was a 1825 graduate of West Point. After graduating, he served as secretary to his brother, a politician and diplomat. Anderson attended the Fortress Monroe Artillery School and translated a French text on artillery into English. From 1837 – 1838, he served as an artillery instructor at West Point. One of his favorite students was a Creole from Louisiana by the name of Pierre GT Beauregard, a member of the 1838 class at West Point.

This relationship between the leaders at the first battle is found throughout the war. The majority of officers on both sides of the war were West Point graduates who had served together during the various Indian Wars and in the War with Mexico. Many were extremely good friends, divided by regional loyalties. Another example, besides Anderson and Beauregard, is General Lewis A. Armistead of Virginia, and Winfield S. Hancock of Pennsylvania.

### **Activity 1**

After the students read about and study the battle at Fort Sumter, have them create a newspaper front page dated April 15, 1861 to demonstrate their understanding of the events of the time as well as the various perspectives of the groups involved.

Materials needed:    large sheets of unlined paper  
                              various books to use as sources  
                              copies of a variety of newspaper  
                              glue sticks or spray adhesive

Day 1 – Give the students modern day newspapers. Through group activities, allow them to discover the different types of information that is contained in a newspaper. Show them the difference between an objective news article and an editorial or feature article.

To teach the students about headlines, give them local community stories or school related stories to create headlines for. Select some of the better headlines and discuss as a class what made the headlines chosen better.

After the students have had an opportunity to become familiar with the structure of a newspaper, they will be more able to create their own.

Day 2+ - Divide the students into small groups of three or four. Assign each group a different city from which to write their newspaper. Possible cities could be:

Charleston, SC  
Washington, DC  
Montgomery, AL  
Richmond, VA  
San Francisco, CA  
Baltimore, MD  
Portland, ME  
Lexington, KY  
Boston, MA

Remind the students that each city would have a somewhat different response to the events based on its location and slave status. Some of the slave states, such as Virginia and North Carolina, had not yet seceded. Other slave states never seceded. How would each city's perceptions of the events that occurred at Ft. Sumter be different than those of the newspapers in Charleston and Washington? The number of articles for the paper would depend on the number of students in the group. There should be at least one standard newspaper article. In addition to that, the students can also write feature articles about some of the people involved, draw political cartoons, include maps or photos of the forts or of Charleston Harbor, write editorials and letters to the editor, and include advertisements that might have been found in the newspapers of the time.

1. The students will have to create a name and banner for their newspaper.
2. The students will need to assign tasks for each member of the group.
3. Students will research and write their individual assignments.

4. When all the articles are finished, the students need to compile their newspaper on the large sheets of paper. These can be presented to the class and displayed around the classroom.

Assessment: Students will be assessed on the accuracy of their articles, how well they reflected the feelings of their city, and on the creativity of their features and “extras.”

### **Activity 2 – Use of Primary Sources**

Have the students read some or all of the following correspondence between Major Robert Anderson and General Pierre G. T. Beauregard from April 11 – 14, 1861.

1. To make better use of time, instead of having all the students read every letter, put the students into groups and give each group one letter to analyze. Use the NARA document analysis sheet at the end of the lesson.

1. In a whole class discussion, ask the students what the tone of the notes between Anderson and Beauregard is. Do they sound like enemies? When the students respond, have them refer to specific passages from the letters to support their answer.

2. Explain to the students the relationship between Anderson and Beauregard. Beauregard was a favorite student of Anderson’s while Anderson was an artillery instructor and Beauregard was a student at West Point.

3. Have each student compose a letter from Anderson to Beauregard or from Beauregard to Anderson after the war is over and Anderson has raised the US flag again on Ft. Sumter. In the letter, have the students present what they think would be Anderson’s or Beauregard’s feelings about his opponent during the initial Ft. Sumter struggle.

4. Attached to their letter, ask the students to write how it would feel to have to fight against and possibly kill someone that they knew well and with whom they were maybe friends.

Other good sources on the relationship between men on each side are the movies *Gettysburg* and *Gods and Generals* or the books on which the movies were based:

Killer Angels by Michael Shaara

Gods and Generals by Jeff Shaara

HEADQUARTERS PROVISIONAL ARMY, C. S. A.,  
Charleston, S. C., April 11, 1861.

SIR: The Government of the Confederate States has hitherto forbore from any hostile demonstration against Fort Sumter, in the hope that the Government of the United States, with a view to the amicable adjustment of all questions between the two Governments, and to avert the calamities of war, would voluntarily evacuate it.

There was reason at one time to believe that such would be the course pursued by the Government of the United States, and under that impression my Government has refrained from making any demand for the surrender of the fort. But the Confederate States can no longer delay assuming actual possession of a fortification commanding the entrance of one of their harbors, and necessary to its defense and security.

I am ordered by the Government of the Confederate States to demand the evacuation of Fort Sumter. My aides, Colonel Chesnut and Captain Lee, are authorized to make such demand of you. All proper facilities will be afforded for the removal of yourself and command, together with company arms and property, and all private property, to any post in the United States which you may select. The flag which you have upheld so long and with so much fortitude, under the most trying circumstances, may be saluted by you on taking it down. Colonel Chesnut and Captain Lee will for a reasonable time, await your answer.

I am, sir, very respectfully, your obedient servant,  
G. T. BEAUREGARD,  
Brigadier-General, Commanding.

Maj. ROBERT ANDERSON,  
Commanding at Fort Sumter, Charleston Harbor, S.C.

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(2) FORT SUMTER, S. C., April 11, 1861.

GENERAL: I have the honor to acknowledge the receipt of your communication demanding the evacuation of this fort, and to say, in reply thereto, that it is a demand with which I regret that my sense of honor, and of my obligations to my Government, prevent my compliance. Thanking you for the fair, manly, and courteous terms proposed, and for the high compliment paid me.

I am, general, very respectfully, your obedient servant,  
ROBERT ANDERSON,  
Major, First Artillery, Commanding.

Brig. Gen. BEAUREGARD,  
Commanding Provisional Army.

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(3) HEADQUARTERS PROVISIONAL ARMY, C. S. A.,  
Charleston, S.C., April 11, 1861.

MAJOR: In consequence of the verbal observation made by you to my aides, Messrs. Chesnut and Lee, in relation to the condition of your supplies, and that you would in a few days be starved out if our guns did not batter you to pieces, or words to that effect, and desiring no useless effusion of blood, I communicated both the verbal observations and your written answer to my communications to my Government.

If you will state the time at which you will evacuate Fort Sumter, and agree that in the mean time you will not use your guns against us unless ours shall be employed against Fort Sumter, we will abstain from opening fire upon you. Colonel Chesnut and Captain Lee are authorized by me to enter into such an agreement with you. You are, therefore, requested to communicate to them an open answer.

I remain, major, very respectfully, your obedient servant,  
G. T. BEAUREGARD,  
Brigadier-General, Commanding.

Maj. ROBERT ANDERSON,  
Commanding Fort Sumter, Charleston Harbor, S.C.

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(4) Fort SUMTER, S.C., April 12, 1861.

GENERAL: I have the honor to acknowledge the receipt by Colonel Chesnut of your second communication of the 11th instant, and to state in reply that, cordially uniting with you in the desire to avoid the useless effusion of blood, I will, if provided with the proper and necessary means of transportation, evacuate Fort Sumter by noon on the 15th instant, and that I will not in the mean time open my fires upon your forces unless compelled to do so by some hostile act against this fort or the flag of my Government by the forces under your command, or by some portion of them, or by the perpetration of some act showing a hostile intention on your part against this fort or the flag it bears, should I not receive prior to that time controlling instructions from my Government or additional supplies.

I am, general, very respectfully, your obedient servant,  
ROBERT ANDERSON,  
Major, First Artillery, Commanding.

Brig. Gen. BEAUREGARD,  
Commanding.

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(5) FORT SUMTER, S.C., April 12, 1861--3.20 a. m.

SIR: By authority of Brigadier-General Beauregard, commanding the Provisional Forces of the Confederate States, we have the honor to notify you that he will open the fire of his batteries on Fort Sumter in one hour from this time.

We have the honor to be, very respectfully, your obedient servants,  
JAMES CHESNUT, JR.,  
Aide-de-Camp.  
STEPHEN D. LEE,  
Captain, C. S. Army, Aide-de-Camp.

Maj. ROBERT ANDERSON,  
U. S. Army, Commanding Fort Sumter.

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(6) FORT SUMTER, S.C.,  
April 13, 1861--20 min. past 2 o'clock.

GENERAL: I thank you for your kindness in having sent your aide to me with an offer of assistance upon your having observed that our flag was down--it being down a few moments, and merely long enough to enable us to replace it on another staff. Your aides will inform you of the circumstance of the visit to my fort by General Wigfall, who said that he came with a message from yourself.

In the peculiar circumstances in which I am now placed in consequence of that message, and of my reply thereto, I will now state that I am willing to evacuate this fort upon the terms and conditions offered by yourself on the 11th instant, at any hour you may name to-morrow, or as soon as we can arrange means of transportation. I will not replace my flag until the return of your messenger.

I have the honor to remain, very respectfully, your obedient servant,  
ROBERT ANDERSON,  
Major, First Artillery, Commanding.

Brig. Gen. G. T. BEAUREGARD,  
Charleston, S.C.



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(7) HEADQUARTERS PROVISIONAL ARMY, C. S. A.,  
April 13, 1861--5 min. to 6 o'clock p.m.

SIR: On being informed that you were in distress, caused by a conflagration in Fort Sumter, I immediately dispatched my aides, Colonels Miles and Pryor, and Captain Lee, to offer you any assistance in my power to give.

Learning a few moments afterwards that a white flag was waving on your ramparts, I sent two others of my aides, Colonel Allston and Major Jones, to offer you the following terms of evacuation: All proper facilities for the removal of yourself and command, together with company arms and private property, to any point within the United States you may select.

Apprised that you desire the privilege of saluting your flag on retiring, I cheerfully concede it, in consideration of the gallantry with which you have defended the place under your charge.

The Catawba steamer will be at the landing of Sumter to-morrow morning at any hour you may designate for the purpose of transporting you whither you may desire.

I remain, sir, very respectfully, your obedient servant,  
G. T. BEAUREGARD,  
Brigadier-General, Commanding

Maj. R. ANDERSON,  
First Artillery, Commanding Fort Sumter, S.C.

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(8) HEADQUARTERS, FORT SUMTER, S. C.,  
April 13, 1861--7.50 p.m.

GENERAL: I have the honor to acknowledge the receipt of your communication of this evening, and to express my gratification at its contents. Should it be convenient, I would like to have the Catawba here at about nine o'clock to-morrow morning.

With sentiments of the highest regard and esteem, I am, general,  
very respectfully, your obedient servant,  
ROBERT ANDERSON,  
Major, U. S. Army, Commanding.

Brig. Gen. G. T. BEAUREGARD,  
Commanding Provisional Army, C. S.

## Written Document Analysis Worksheet

1. TYPE OF DOCUMENT (Check one):

- |                                     |  |   |
|-------------------------------------|--|---|
| <input type="checkbox"/> Newspaper  | <input type="checkbox"/> Map           | <input type="checkbox"/> Advertisement        |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Letter     | <input type="checkbox"/> Telegram      | <input type="checkbox"/> Congressional record |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Patent     | <input type="checkbox"/> Press release | <input type="checkbox"/> Census report        |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Memorandum | <input type="checkbox"/> Report        | <input type="checkbox"/> Other                |

2. UNIQUE PHYSICAL QUALITIES OF THE DOCUMENT (Check one or more):

- |   |   |
|---|---|
| <input type="checkbox"/> Interesting letterhead | <input type="checkbox"/> Notations        |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Handwritten            | <input type="checkbox"/> "RECEIVED" stamp |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Typed                  | <input type="checkbox"/> Other            |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Seals                  |   |

3. DATE(S) OF DOCUMENT:

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4. AUTHOR (OR CREATOR) OF THE DOCUMENT:

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POSITION (TITLE):

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5. FOR WHAT AUDIENCE WAS THE DOCUMENT WRITTEN?

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6. DOCUMENT INFORMATION (There are many possible ways to answer A-E.)

A. List three things the author said that you think are important:

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B. Why do you think this document was written?

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C. What evidence in the document helps you know why it was written? Quote from the document.

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D. List two things the document tells you about life in the United States at the time it was written:

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E. Write a question to the author that is left unanswered by the document:

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